

## Hoke County Natural Area Inventory

### FORT BRAGG GUM BRANCH

**Site Significance:** national

**Size:** 517 acres

**USGS Quadrangle:** McCain

**Ownership:** US Dept. of Defense

**SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:** Gum Branch Significant Natural Heritage Area contains an assemblage of rare plants and high quality natural communities, including Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill (Clay/Rock Hilltop Variant) and the very rare Bog Variant of Coastal Plain Semipermanent Impoundment, as well as more common communities. The site is at the southern edge of a group of six SNHAs along Rockfish Creek and tributaries, which form an area large enough to be managed on a landscape basis. There are few other large-scale, high-quality, intact areas like this in the Sandhills region. Gum Branch SHNA supports a good diversity of flora and fauna, including two Federally Endangered plants: roughleaf loosestrife (*Lysimachia asperulifolia*) and Michaux's sumac (*Rhus michauxii*), as well as two Federal Species of Concern plants: Sandhills pyxie-moss (*Pyxidanthra barbulata* var. *brevifolia*), and Harper's yellow-eyed-grass (*Xyris scabrifolia*). Bachman's sparrows (*Aimophila aestivalis*, FSC) breed here. A remarkable colony of yellow pitcher plants (*Sarracenia flava*) and other bog species occur in a beaver impacted portion of Gum Branch.

**LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS:** Gum Branch SNHA is located in the western section of Fort Bragg, adjacent to Nijmegen Drop Zone, between Rockfish Creek and Gum Branch. Moore County Road roughly divides the site in half and runs along a high ridge between the two creeks. It lies just south of Central Rockfish Creek SNHA and west of Southern Rockfish Creek SNHA.

**SITE DESCRIPTION:** The site is dominated by gently rolling, longleaf pine-forested terrain with Xeric Sandhill Scrub and Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill communities on the ridge and upland areas and Streamhead Pocosin and Sandhill Seep vegetation scattered across lower slopes. Unusual features in the natural area include: 1) a Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill (Clay/Rock Hilltop Variant) with an outcrop of ironstone located just south of Moore County Road between Firebreaks 25 and 26; 2) a Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill (Mesic Transition Variant) community associated with the sandstone outcrop; 3) broad Sandhill Seeps on the slopes above Rockfish Creek; 4) broad ecotones along the well-burned northern edges of Gum Branch; 5) a Coastal Plain Semipermanent Impoundment (Bog Variant) community along Gum Branch north of Firebreak 33 which is full of pitcher plants; and 6) Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill (Mesic Transition Variant) communities in minor swales and depressions south of Moore County Road. The area is in good to excellent ecological condition.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** Localized areas of severe ground disturbance occur along the firebreaks and Moore County Road. Siltation fans along the road have penetrated up to 30 meters into the adjacent woodlands at several points. Troop activity in the area appears to be moderately light, despite its proximity to the frequently used Nijmegen Drop Zone. Bivouac sites and infrequently used footpaths are scattered through the upland areas, but in general, soil